

Ideologies of the Chinese language in Finland

—a critical analysis of policy documents and news articles

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Abstract:

In recent years, the visibility and importance of the Chinese language (Mandarin) has been rising globally due to its emerging status as a significant global language used by native and non-native speakers and learners. This study looks into how Finland, a small country where English is used as a second language, deals with the growing prominence of the Chinese language. More specifically, we are interested in how Finnish policies and media respond and contribute to the emerging global discourses on the Chinese language. Drawing on critical discourse analysis we examined the discourses on the Chinese language presented in policy documents and two of the main news outlets in Finland—Yleisradio (Yle) and Helsingin Sanomat (HS)—with the aim to reveal what ideologies lie behind the construction of the Chinese language. Four prevailing categories of ideological discourses of the Chinese language emerged from our analysis of the political and media texts: Chinese as a useful language, Chinese as a world/global language, Chinese as an increasingly popular language, and Chinese as a different and/or difficult language. We argue that despite the multiple societal meanings the Chinese language appears to have in the policy documents and news articles, the discourses are related to the economic allure of China and share similar ideological roots that emphasize the symbolic capital of the Chinese language.

Keywords: the Chinese language, language ideologies, discourse, policy documents, news articles

Introduction

The past decade has witnessed an increasing interest in learning the Chinese language (mainly Mandarin) across the world (Du & Kirkebæk, 2012; Wang, 2009; Zhu & Li, 2014). The main reasons behind the growing interest are the emergence of China as an economic super power in the world and its rapidly growing prominence in world affairs (Lo Bianco, 2011), the wide spread of Chinese diaspora communities in different countries (Li, 2005; Zhang & Li, 2010), and the promotion of the Chinese language by Hanban (the Office of Chinese Language Council International) as a form of soft power (Ding & Saunders, 2006; Starr, 2009).

In the wake of the growth of the Chinese language teaching and learning, there is a growing body of research on Chinese as a second/foreign language. Researchers (Duff et al. 2015) have noticed that existing research has mainly focused on the linguistic, psycholinguistic, social-psychological, and orthographic aspects of the acquisition of the Chinese language. Studies informed by sociological, anthropological, and sociocultural theory and focusing on the contexts and meanings of learning and using the Chinese language is relatively rare. *Language ideologies*, as “mediating links between social forms and forms of talk” (Woolard, 1998, p. 3), is a useful concept to help understand how linguistic phenomena are imbued with particular meanings and values in discourse (Milani, 2013). Existing studies that touch upon ideologies of Chinese as a second language (Duff et al., 2015; Duff et al., 2013; Li, 2015) have mainly focused on major English-speaking countries such as the United States (US), the United Kingdom (UK), and Canada. How small countries (in terms of size and international weight), where English is not the first language, deal with the rise of China and the Chinese language is yet to be explored.

This study focuses on Finland, a Nordic country where English has been the foreign language par excellence over the last four decades (Leppänen & Pahta, 2012), while the presence of China and the Chinese language has gradually emerged over the past 10 years or so, due to the increasing growth in Finnish-Chinese economic relations. The value of learning the Chinese language is now recognized and discussed in Finnish society, but the phenomenon has rarely been researched. The lead author is a Chinese-speaking researcher based in Finland. Over the past few years, she has witnessed the growing presence of the Chinese language in Finnish society and noticed the discourses circulating in the media and society around the Chinese language, which are charged with ideologies and often lead people to discuss the Chinese language education in certain ways. As van Dijk (2000) argues, media discourse is the main source of the attitudes and ideologies of ordinary people, and it often intersects with political discourses (Thomas, 2002). The language used in media reports and policy documents is not merely a neutral and value-free reflection of reality. Instead, it works to inscribe a preferred mode of social reality and thus to influence public opinion (Thomas, 2002). Therefore, an

investigation into the discourses about the Chinese language circulating in Finnish media reports and policy documents can reveal what ideologies of the Chinese language are explicitly and implicitly presented to the public and how these ideologies are constructed and (re)produced. To this end, we analyse four Finnish policy documents and 24 news reports from two of Finland's leading news outlets—Yleisradio (*the Finnish Broadcasting Company*, hereafter Yle) and Helsingin Sanomat (Helsinki Daily, hereafter HS)—related to the Chinese language; we argue that these are the 'discursive spaces' (Milani & Johnson, 2010) in which different ideological representations of the Chinese language are exposed.

We begin by briefly outlining the context of Chinese as a foreign language in Finland. Particular attention is given to the growing presence of the Chinese language in Finland due to interstate cooperation, Chinese immigration and the rise of China as a new global superpower. The theoretical perspectives in the study are then considered. We also discuss existing studies and explain how the notion of "language ideology" is useful in examining the discourses of the Chinese language in the Finnish media and political domain. We then present the findings and analysis of the four prevailing categories of ideological discourses of the Chinese language, followed by key conclusions.

Chinese language education in Finland

In Europe, foreign language policies used to emphasise the promotion of teaching and learning of European languages within and across its member states, but recent studies show a shift towards a new policy framework and discourses that place more emphasis on "major 'world' languages" such as (Mandarin) Chinese, Japanese, Russian and Arabic (Fenoulhet & Ros i Solé, 2011; Pérez-Milans, 2015). Similar to what is happening in many other parts of the world, the increasing numbers of Chinese immigrants and students in Europe over the past decades (Zhang, 2013), the perceived value of Chinese as a foreign language due mainly to the economic and political rise of China, and the great effort made by Hanban or Confucius Institutes (Han, 2017, Starr, 2009) have contributed to the boom in the Chinese language learning in Europe. Languages are considered a vehicle for cooperation between Europe and China (European Commission, 2013). The recognition of the value of the Chinese language in European Union (EU) political discourse has inevitably affected its member countries. A number of countries in Europe (e.g., France, the UK) have witnessed great expansion in the Chinese language teaching and learning (Starr, 2009) in the past decade.

In Finland, the Chinese language education has not experienced such expansion, but has witness significant development. Finns started to learn Chinese as early as the 19th century (Gao, 2009). However, Chinese was only available to a very small number of learners and mainly taught as an optional beginners' course in universities until fairly recently. In 2007, following the official visit by

then Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao to Finland, the first Confucius Institute in Finland—the Confucius Institute at the University of Helsinki—was established. The same year, a work group was established by Sitra (the Finnish Innovation Fund) to conduct a survey on the need for the introduction of basic education in the Chinese language in Helsinki. The survey revealed a growing need for basic education in Chinese in the metropolitan area. This conclusion led, a year later, to the establishment of the first Chinese-Finnish bilingual comprehensive (primary and secondary) school in the country, the Meilahden Ala-asteen Koulu, initiating a new era of the Chinese language education in Finnish schools. Since then, even more schools have begun to provide the Chinese language courses to their students.

In 2013, in an interview with the Chinese media People.cn (the internet platform of the China daily), the then Finnish Ambassador to China (Jari Gustafsson) expressed that learning the Chinese language was becoming more popular in Finland. The media report used “the Chinese language fever” to describe the “irresistible trend in the economic and trade cooperation between Finland and China” (People.cn, 2013). While “fever” and “irresistible trend” might be considered an overstatement, a strategy often used in media coverage, the use of such terms reflected the fact that the Chinese language has gradually gained a place in Finnish political discourses. According to an ongoing survey by the lead author on the provision of the Chinese language in Finland, there are now about 30 primary and secondary schools, 20 higher education institutions and a number of cultural clubs and adult education institutions providing Chinese courses. However, there are wide regional discrepancies when it comes to demand and supply. Chinese language instruction is mainly available in the capital region of Helsinki. Palomäki (2015) also notes that even though the number of Chinese courses offered in Finnish high schools has grown significantly in the past few years, learners have not shown great take up yet.

This brief outline of the recent development of the Chinese language education in Finland took place against the backdrop of the emergence of new discourses and ideological and policy shifts about foreign language education in Europe and the world, reflecting how Finland is inevitably influenced by and responding to these circulating global discourses about language education. It was also triggered by an increasingly globalised market economy and the perceived value of learning Chinese among the Finnish state and ordinary people.

Language ideologies

The concept of language ideologies is useful for understanding the implicit and explicit assumptions people have about a language or language in general in relation to their social experience and political and economic interests. Over the past few decades, the notion of language ideology has

gained considerable research interest in different strands of scholarship that aim to unpack how language works in society (Milani, 2013). Silverstein, considered to be the first scholar to put forward a definition of language ideologies defined it as “[a set] of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use” (Silverstein, 1979: 193). This definition emphasizes the role of a speaker’s linguistic awareness in rationalizing and thus influencing a language’s structure. For Irvine (1989, P. 255), language ideology is “the cultural system of ideas about social and linguistic relationships, together with their loading of moral and political interests”. Kroskrity (2000, p. 497) argues that language ideologies are not merely those ideas which stem from the “official culture” of the ruling class, but rather more ubiquitous sets of diverse beliefs, used by speakers as models for constructing linguistic evaluations and engaging in communicative activity. Furthermore, language ideologies “often index the political economic interests of individual speakers, ethnic and other interest groups, and nation states” (Kroskrity, 2010, p. 192). This indexical linkage between social and linguistic relationships is better explained by Woolard (1998, p. 3), who understands language ideologies as (explicit or implicit) cultural representations of the intersections of language and human beings in a social world. In this understanding, language ideologies, mediating between social structures and forms of talk, are not only about linguistic codes, but serve individual and group-specific interests. In other words, language ideologies are not merely about language, but always formulated from a particular social perspective and have particular referents and targets (Androutsopoulos, 2010).

The words “ideas” and “beliefs” in the definition of language ideologies may imply that the cognitive dimensions and ideological construction of languages should not be overlooked. However, Cameron (2003, p. 448) argues that language ideologies are ultimately social constructs: “ways of understanding the world that emerge from interaction with particular (public) representations of it”. In this study, we recognise individual space and agency in the construction of language ideologies. That is, we acknowledge that the decision people make as to whether to learn the Chinese language is related to their cultural and social beliefs about this language and its role in their particular society. However, our focus is more on the social dimension, on the public discourses which largely frame the construction of the Chinese language. Media and political discourses have a powerful influence on the formation of attitudes in society (Van Dijk, 2000), and are thus rich sites to reveal the ways in which ideologies related to the Chinese language are imposed or appropriated.

Focusing on policy documents and news reports

Language ideologies are often expressed in the institutional discourses of governmental agencies, educational organizations and media press (Faircough, 2001). The discourses about the Chinese

language presented in policy documents and in the news articles compose the focus of analysis in this study. Firstly, we believe that what people overtly say and write about languages, or even how they visually represent them, can provide the analyst with a fruitful repository of beliefs about the language. Secondly, a focus on public, rather than private, representations of discourses about the Chinese language is of political relevance because of the potential impact that such representations might have on a mass audience (Milani, 2012). We agree with Fairclough (1992) that discourse is ideological when it contributes to the existence of power relations. Keeping control of the power structure can be achieved by spreading certain types of information and (mis)conceptions among the public, which then leads to their support or rejection of certain policies. This is particularly true with political and media discourses because they are both controlled by powerful institutions and are intended to influence public opinion by presenting reality in particular ways.

Political documents provide an important space for ideological discourses. Van Dijk (2002) asserts that “probably more than any other kind of discourse, political discourse is eminently ideological”. Chilton (2008, p. 226) defines political discourse as “the use of language to do the business of politics and includes persuasive rhetoric, the use of implied meanings, the use of euphemisms, the exclusion of references to undesirable reality, the use of language to arouse political emotions and the like”. In other words, political discourse, by employing a series of speech techniques, aims at gaining the consensus of people on a particular political act. In this study we adopt Van Dijk’s (1997) sense of political discourse and confine it to the texts of policies and strategy documents made by Finnish national institutions such as the Finnish Ministry of Education, Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, and Finnish National Agency for Education. The policy/strategy documents concerning language are not merely statements; they reflect what policy makers consider valuable in terms of language and have real effects on the allocation of education resources, thus influencing how people act towards different languages. In other words, the policy/strategy documents concerning the Chinese language have real impact on the funding situation and provision of the Chinese language, which to some extent controls how people behave towards the Chinese language.

According to Milani & Johnson (2010), media, constrained or pressed by particular economic or political imperatives, open up *discursive spaces*, thereby giving a public voice to social actors who compete with each other in defining what counts as legitimate language. The producers of media discourses, as *ideological brokers* (Blommaert, 1999, p. 9), not only frame reality by foregrounding, backgrounding or erasing certain aspects of it, but also represent reality by incorporating, and thereby indicating, a particular interpretation of existing ideologically-laden discourses on that very reality (Milani, 2007). As one of the most common forms of mass media in contemporary society, news articles are an important site of ideological production in that they not only cite and repeat, but also

strategically recontextualise discourses that are produced elsewhere (Fairclough 1995; Gal & Woolard, 2001; Milani, 2007). Accordingly, in our case, news articles provide rich discursive sites for the investigation of ideologies of the Chinese language. News articles are constructed with certain lexical elements which are particular choices out of many possible ones and serve certain ideological purposes. By giving voice to particular social actors and presenting the reality of the Chinese language in certain ways, news articles on the Chinese language are ideologically charged and intended to influence how people should understand and react to this reality. When news articles are presented to the public, they might not have the power to control what people think or how they behave towards the Chinese language, but they can influence how people think and respond to the information they provide.

A few studies have paid attention to the ideological discourses surrounding the Chinese language as a second language in public space. In his paper entitled *On the Global Image in the International Promotion of Chinese Language*, Li (2015) discussed the Chinese language education from the perspective of the global image of language. He asserted that, unlike the image of French as “elegance” and “civilization” and English “internationalization” and “modernity”, the current image of the Chinese language is that of “mystical, economically profitable, and hard to learn”. This image of Chinese, according to Li, has a negative influence on the promotion of the Chinese language globally. Therefore Li proposed that efforts should be made to create a positive image of Chinese, emphasising its “economic dividend” and “attractive culture”. Li’s paper shows how the subject of Chinese language teaching and learning can be highly politicised in the context of ideologically charged public discourses. However, Li’s arguments are intuitive rather than empirical. Li’s paper does not focus on examining the ideological construction of the Chinese language in different domains, but aims to provide suggestions on how to promote the Chinese language through presenting the Chinese language and culture in a positive way. This stance is quite similar to the Chinese state’s ‘soft power’ ideology (Zhu & Li, 2014) towards global promotion of the Chinese language.

Duff et al. (2015) analysed English-medium news reports on Chinese language education from 2004 to 2014 in three Anglophone countries. Their findings revealed that reports dealing with Chinese language education tended to fall into one of several major tropes, which they roughly classified as “hope”, “hype”, and “fear”. That is, earlier coverage reflected the media’s attitude towards Chinese language change from indifference to recognition of the uniqueness and exoticness of Chinese, and the importance of the language for the strategic interests of English-dominant nations and individuals, given China’s growing economic clout; later reports reflected an emerging fear and disillusionment with Chinese. This study, as the author admits, is mainly based on the analysis of the titles of the news reports. A more detailed analysis of the content of the news reports would yield deeper understanding

of the ideologies than just the general pattern of changes in the media discourses about the Chinese language. In addition, the study focuses on the English-dominant environment where the position of English as the must-learned global language is strong.

In another study by the same lead author, Duff and colleagues (2013) briefly discuss how media such as the New York Times and CNN portray the rise of China and the Chinese language. According to them, many of the news articles on the increasing number of non-Chinese Mandarin learners employ highly emotionally-charged words and metaphors to describe the phenomenon, many of which have negative connotations. They discovered that popular news articles tend to have two things in common: they assert the economic advantage of learning Mandarin by arguing that knowledge of the language will help young people secure jobs, and they emphasise the difficulty that Westerners (speakers of English and other European languages) experience learning Chinese because of its non-alphabetic script and its system of tones. In this way, they exalt Mandarin as a key to economic success, and also characterise it as a mysterious and impenetrable code. This portrayal of the Chinese language echoes what Li (2015) has claimed as the current image of the Chinese language in the world. The findings from these few studies show that public discourse about the Chinese language is a fertile field for researchers to reveal how particular ideas or beliefs about the Chinese language are produced, circulated and/or challenged.

Having presented the current context of the representation and development of the Chinese language in Finland, the theoretical concept to examine this context, and a brief review of previous studies, we now turn to the research questions. In this study, we aim to answer the following research questions:

1. How is the Chinese language constructed in policy documents and news articles in Finland; and
2. What ideologies of the Chinese language are embedded in these discourses.

To answer these two questions, we next discuss the methodology employed in this study.

Methodology

Data

To investigate the ideological representations of the Chinese language in the political and media discourses in the Finnish society, we drew on Finnish policy documents and newspaper articles that were related to the Chinese language. Four policy documents in which the Chinese language were mentioned, two in English and two in Finnish, were chosen for analysis:

1. *Suomi, Aasia ja kansainvälinen yhteistyö* (Finland, Asia and International Co-operation). This

Asia action programme, prepared by the Finnish Ministry of Education, was adopted on 20 March, 2006. The objective of the programme was to create a strategic frame of reference that would steer co-operation with Asian countries. Several focal areas were selected, with languages being one, because “[k]nowledge of languages and cultures is one of the most central prerequisites for international cooperation.” The Asia action programme has direct effects on financial allocation and future actions on different priority areas regarding the funding of language learning (or whatever it focused on).

2. *Finland’s China Action Plan* was prepared by Finland’s Ministry for Foreign Affairs in 2010, aiming to present a comprehensive overview of China’s role as an international actor and partner to Finland and the EU; to review relations between Finland and China; and to identify opportunities to further develop and increase cooperation. In this document, enhancing knowledge about China is considered an important element for deepening Sino-Finnish relations.
3. *Kohti Tulevaisuuden Kielikoulutusta Kielikoulutuspoliittisen Projektin Loppuraportti* (The Final of the National Project on Finnish Language Education Policies). The National Project on Finnish Language Education Policies was funded by the Ministry of Education and the University of Jyväskylä during 2005-2007, and was set up to examine language education as widely as possible, with particular emphasis on language education as a continuum and on issues of lifelong learning. This Final report was written by a group of researchers in 2007. Although it had no direct authority or mandate over language education policies, researchers (Nikula et al., 2012) believe that several suggestions from it found their way into a central document in Finnish education policy which set the framework for education policies for the five-year period that they cover.
4. *Lukion Opetussuunnitelman Perusteet 2015* (National Core Curriculum for Upper Secondary school 2015). In Finland the national core curriculum (reformed every 10 years) is drawn up by the Finnish National Board of Education, and defines the objectives and core contents of the different subjects, subject groups, thematic subject modules and student counselling. The newest National Core Curriculum for Upper Secondary Schools was reformed in 2015 and the local curricula based on the new national core curriculum came into effect on 1 August 2016. the Chinese language, together with Japanese and Arabic, was for the first time officially included in the curriculum as an optional language.

These four policy documents were chosen because they are directly related to China, the Chinese language and Chinese language education. They differ in style and orientation. As it is not possible within the confines of a single article to analyse each of them in its entirety, we only focus on those instances of texts that clearly have to do with the Chinese language either explicitly or by implication. These instances of texts are regarded as key elements in the ideological construction of the Chinese

language.

The news articles were selected from *Yle*, *HS*, and its simplified English version the *Helsinki Times*. Yle is Finland's 99.9 percent state-owned national public service media company. HS is the largest unaffiliated national daily newspaper of Finland, and the largest subscription-based daily in the Nordic countries. These news outlets were chosen because they had the widest readership, hence influence, in the country. The news articles were retrieved from three electronic databases (www.yle.fi, www.hs.fi and www.helsinkitimes.fi) through searching the keywords “Chinese”, “the Chinese language”, “Mandarin”, “Cantonese”, “Kiina (Chinese)”, “Kiinan kieli (the Chinese language)”, “Mandariinikiina (Mandarin)” and “Kantonikiina (Cantonese)”. We included 24 news articles, 18 in Finnish and six in English, the length of which ranged from 79 to 687 words. In addition, several pictures and one video within the news articles were also included in our analysis. The selected news articles covered the period from 2008 to when this study was conducted in May, 2016, because, as we have mentioned, 2008 was to some extent a milestone that marked a new era of the Chinese language education in Finland, due to the establishment of the first Chinese-Finnish bilingual comprehensive school.

Methods

We employed content analysis and critical discourse analysis (CDA) to analyse our data. Content analysis helped us to get a general picture of our data and allowed us to focus on the selected aspects of meaning that are related to our research questions (Schreier, 2014). Critical discourse analysis helped us reveal the linguistic choices made to create power differentials, taking into account underlying ideologies (Punakallio & Dervin, 2015). We have chosen the framework of CDA developed by Fairclough (1992, 1993, 2003) to analyse our data. Fairclough's framework is a multilayered analysis that incorporates textual, processing and social levels of discourse analysis and is based on three components: description, interpretation and explanation. For Fairclough (2003), language use is dialogical, setting up relations between different voices. He termed this dialogic nature of texts “intertextuality”, arguing that texts and talk from a particular social domain—for example the policy documents and media news articles—should be examined to see which voices, discourses, genres or styles are included and which might be excluded, thus being significantly absent. While CDA emphasises and provides methodological means to foreground the relationships between language use and the social world (Fairclough 2003; Van Dijk, 1993, 2003; Wodak 2001), individual voices can often be backgrounded. The discourses about the Chinese language investigated in this study do not occur in a vacuum; instead, they are engaged in a process of endless re-description of the world around them (Blackledge, 2005; Fairclough, 2003). Therefore, during the analysis, we also

take into consideration the dialogical nature of the discourses: whose voice was heard; what is the social relationship among institutions such as government and media press, and individuals; and the intertextuality within and beyond different texts.

We first read all the texts (policy documents and news articles) several times for a general picture of the data. Then we read the texts with a particular focus on the Chinese language. We focused on document types, how the Chinese language appeared in the text, and what was said about the Chinese language. In this step, we created a chart to list the information of the time and source of the texts, and the instances of texts related to the Chinese language. Then we categorized the instances of texts based on the recurring themes. Finally, we added our interpretation and possible explanation, with special attention paid to the word choices related to Chinese, and the intertextuality between news articles, and between news articles and policy documents. Four prevailing categories of ideological discourse emerged from the data, which are described in the next section. We present the Finnish data in their original, followed by an English translation (by the first author and checked by two English-Finnish bilingual speakers).

Ideological discourses of the Chinese language

Four key themes concerning ideological discourses of the Chinese language emerged from the analysis: Chinese as a useful language, Chinese as an increasingly popular language, Chinese as a world and/or global language, and Chinese as a difficult language.

Chinese as a useful language

The dominant discourse identified Chinese as a language that primarily served a pragmatic function. Among the articles and policy documents, 16 texts explicitly or implicitly constructed Chinese as a useful language: it could bring job opportunities; it could boost cooperation between China and Finland; and it could help to strengthen Finland's international competitiveness.

In the news articles about how learning Chinese was related to learners' future careers, the words "job opportunities", "mobile labour force", "experts", and "professionals" often appeared across the texts, and China's strengthening economic power was often discussed. The following excerpt drew on the "expert" voice of the language centre director of the University of Eastern Finland, who highlighted students' increasing interest in learning the Chinese language:

Excerpt 1

Kiinan kieli kiinnostaa Itä-Suomen yliopistossa. Yliopiston kielikeskuksen johtaja Raija Elsinen sanoo, että Kiinan jatkuvasti vahvistuva talousmahti saa myös

itäsuomalaiset opiskelijat tarttumaan kiinan kieleen. (The Chinese language is attracting interest at the University of Eastern Finland. University Language Centre Director Raija Elsinen says that due to China's constantly strengthening economic power, students in Eastern Finland must also seize the opportunity to learn the Chinese language.) (Yle, 18, November, 2010)

Giving voice selectively to authority figures/experts (e.g., the director of the language centre) was a common practice in the news articles to legitimate an ideology: namely, through the voice of the language centre director, this news article implied that learning Chinese was useful by linking the learning of the Chinese language to China's economic power, which students could then access, thus increasing their future job opportunities.

In a news article *Popularity of English as foreign language grows* (Yle, 08, May, 2014) about the increasing popularity of English leading to fewer learners of other foreign languages, the author claimed that the number of learners of Spanish, Chinese and Japanese languages had increased despite the influence of English. The news article was illustrated with a picture of five youths with confident smiles on their faces. Its caption said: Chinese will become an important language of business, predicts high-school student Harald Takki. The five students all study Asian languages at high school. At the end of the report, Ari Huovinen, the principal of the Ressu School (an elite upper secondary school in Helsinki) was quoted: "In the future, nearly everyone will come into contact with Asians in working life". Through the use of a photograph, quotations from a student, the voice of the principal of a well-known elite upper secondary school, and the use of the future tense "will", this article sent a strong signal about the usefulness of Asian languages, with the Chinese language singled out. Thus, these news articles constructed Chinese as both an important and useful language that could make its learners stand out in the competitive international and domestic labour market.

The second subtheme addressing Chinese as a useful language referred to boosting cooperation between China and Finland. A number of articles placed Finland in a wider global context, and raised the position of the Chinese language to one that can affect Finland's national competitiveness. In Finland, national competitiveness is often explicitly related to international trade and cooperation. Asian languages, especially the Chinese language, are considered to be the vehicle to access Asian markets. Excerpt 2 was from a news article from HS. The headline of the article is *Englannin kielelle tarvitaan haastajia* (English language should be challenged). Under the headline is the subtitle *Varsinainen valttikortti olisi aasialaisten kielten osaaminen*, which means "the actual trump card is Asian languages".

Excerpt 2

Japani ja kiina sisällytetään vihdoinkin uusina vieraina kielinä lukion uuteen

opetussuunnitelmaan elokuusta 2016 alkaen. Ensimmäinen askel on otettu, toimijoita tarvitaan. (Japanese and Chinese will finally be included as the new foreign languages in the new upper secondary school curriculum from August 2016 onwards. The first step has been taken; actors are needed.) (HS, 22, January, 2016)

In the subtitle, the author suggested the “valttikortti (trump card)” for Helsinki to stand out was to learn Asian languages because everybody knows English. The article starts by mentioning a previous article about how Helsinki was becoming an attractive place for international firms to operate, in order to contextualise Helsinki’s position in the international arena. It then used two Finnish companies that have been very successful in Asian markets, Finnair and Slush, to exemplify how Finnish companies could benefit from a strong focus on this area. At the end of the article, the author urged that “Maamme kielikoulutuspolitiikassa kannattaisi hoksata sama asia (Our education policy should do the same thing)”, by highlighting how the new high school curriculum had taken action by including Chinese and Japanese as foreign languages. By using the metaphor “trump card”, mentioning two well-known Finnish companies, and referring to the new National Core curriculum for Upper Secondary Education, the article works to persuade target readers that learning Asian languages, especially Chinese and Japanese, could help Finnish companies to stand out in international competition. The intertextuality—citing the information in a previous news article and mentioning the new curriculum—helps to strengthen the author’s argument. By doing so, this article situated existing texts and discourses into a chosen metadiscursive context, and hence indicated the preferred way(s) of ‘reading’ these texts and discourses (Blommaert, 1999, p. 9; Milani, 2007).

In another news article from Yle, entitled *Koululaisten yksipuolinen kielitaito kaventaa kansainvälisen kaupan mahdollisuuksia – ”Englannin kielellä voidaan ostaa, mutta ei myydä”* (Schoolchildren’s one-sided language skills to narrow the international trade opportunities-“with English you can buy, but can’t sell”), the author blamed English for the narrowed international trade opportunities. This news article addressed the concern that Finnish students learn fewer languages than before. It quoted the Vice Chairman of the Board of the Finnish Language Teachers' Association and French language lecturer of SYK (Helsingin Suomalainen Yhteiskoulu, a well-regarded private school in Helsinki) that “Englannin kielellä voidaan ostaa, mutta ei myydä (English maybe used for buying, but not for selling)” because “Jos halutaan myydä muihin maihin tuotteita, kyllä meidän täytyy osata niiden kieliä ja tuntea maiden kulttuurit, (If we want to sell products to other countries, surely we need to know the languages and the cultures of the countries)”. Under the section of the *Kielet auttavat kaupankäynnissä* (Languages help trading), another authority figure—the director of the Trade Union of Education—commented that, in addition to Russian, Chinese and Spanish would be good to know. Although the Chinese language is not at the centre of discussion, the mentioning of

it in relation to trading contributed to the construction of the usefulness of the Chinese language as a tool to assess the Chinese market.

The third subtheme—the discourse that learning Chinese can help to increase national competitiveness—has also circulated in policy/strategy documents. In the *Kohti Tulevaisuuden Kielikoulutusta Kielikoulutuspoliittisen Projektin Loppuraportti* (the Final Report of the National Project on Finnish Language Education Policies, 2007, p. 113-115), the importance of and rationale for providing the Chinese language was discussed extensively under the section: *Kiina-ilmiötä myös kielikoulutuksessa* (‘China-phenomenon in language training’). In this excerpt, Chinese, together with Spanish, Japanese and Arabic, was mentioned in relation to national competitiveness.

Excerpt 3

Millainen on Suomen kilpailukyky globalisaatiossa, jos maasta ei löydy riittävästi espanjan, kiinan, japanin ja arabian osaajia? (What will happen to Finland's competitiveness in globalisation, if the country cannot find enough professionals who know Spanish, Chinese, Japanese and Arabic?) (Final Report of the National Project on Finnish Language Education Policies, date, p. 10)

Regarding (foreign) language as a tool for increasing national competitiveness is not a new argument in the making of language policy in many countries. In most cases, the target language is English (Lee, 2010; Pan, 2011). In the document above, the relatively less studied foreign languages in Finland—Spanish, Chinese, Japanese and Arabic—were tied to the future position of the country in a globalising world. It is not known why these four languages were listed in this order. One way to interpret this ordering is to relate it to what Zhou (2010) refers to as ‘language order’—the language hierarchy in a multilingual community. According to Zhou, a changing global language order has, in the long term, consequences for the existing language order in any given country, as long as it (the country? Or do you mean the language? Put in parentheses to avoid ambiguity) is globally connected.

These discourses about the usefulness of Chinese appear to be similar and interrelated in both the news outlets and policy documents. This demonstrates that newspaper articles, as well as political documents, are important sites of ideology production because they not only cite and repeat, but also strategically recontextualise texts and discourses originally produced elsewhere in and by other media (Blommaert 1999; Fairclough, 1995; Gal & Woolard, 2001).

Chinese as a world and/or global language

The second major theme, Chinese as a world language, was the most frequent construct of the Chinese language in policy documents. This construct is often used as a rationale to promote or provide the teaching of the language in Finnish schools. On 1 July, 2010, the Finnish Ministry for

Foreign Affairs announced Finland's first China Action Plan, which "reflected the collective view of different ministries about their cooperation with China and highlighted the importance of China in the commercial and economic sector as well as in other domains" (Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2010). In the China Action Plan, China's growing global role was discussed (p. 5) and the objective of "increasing the knowledge of Finland in China and knowledge of China in Finland" for deepening the Sino-Finnish relations was emphasised (p. 16). This included the teaching and learning of each other's languages.

In another policy document, the newest national curriculum for general upper secondary schools: *Lukion opetussuunnitelman perusteet 2015* (National Core Curriculum for General Upper Secondary Schools 2015), Chinese, together with Japanese, was included as a B3 language (optional foreign language for high school students). This means that for the first time the status of the Chinese language was officially recognised in the Finnish school system.

Excerpt 4

Aasian ja Afrikan kielillä tarkoitetaan maailman valtakieliä, kuten japania, kiinaa tai arabiaa, joissa käytetään monenlaisia kirjoitusjärjestelmiä. (Asian and African languages are the dominant languages of the world. Languages such as Japanese, Chinese or Arabic are used in a wide variety of writing systems.) (*Lukion opetussuunnitelman perusteet 2015*: National Core Curriculum for General Upper Secondary Schools, 2015)

Shohamy (2006: 76) considers foreign language education policy "a form of imposition and manipulation of language policy as it is used by those in authority to turn ideology into practice through formal education." Following this understanding, the changed status of the above-mentioned languages in the Finnish high school curriculum reflected the state's ideologies towards them by imposing principles and regulations on their teaching, learning and use in the centralised educational system.

Several news articles also echoed the construction of Chinese as a global language. The following excerpt was taken from a news article entitled *Global languages should replace compulsory Swedish in schools*. Finland has two official languages: Finnish, spoken by about 90 percent of the population; and Swedish, spoken by about five percent of the population. Their equal status has been guaranteed in language legislation since 1922. Swedish is a mandatory school subject for Finnish-speaking pupils and Finnish for Swedish-speaking pupils. The status of Swedish has, in recent years, generated debate within the country, particularly over the mandatory teaching of Swedish in Finnish-language schools. In this excerpt, the writer expresses her opinion about the status of Swedish in Finland:

Excerpt 5

I am in favour of making learning Swedish optional on certain conditions. Before my parliamentary career, I worked in international commerce and it was only very rarely that Swedish skills came in handy. Instead of a marginal language spoken by a small number of people, children should be taught global languages, such as Chinese and Spanish. (Helsinki Times, 12 September, 2013)

In this excerpt, the writer mentions her parliamentary career. Her choice of words such as “rarely”, “marginal” and “a small number of people”, which she associates with Swedish, contrast strongly with the phrase “global language”, which refers to Chinese and Spanish. Ideologies about language are often taken for granted and naturalised (Woolard & Schiefflin, 1994: 56). Here the ideology of Chinese as a world/global language is used as if it is common sense to argue for marginalising the teaching of Swedish, the second official language in Finland.

Chinese as an increasingly popular language

The third theme highlighted the increasing popularity of the Chinese language. Several news reports discussed the newly inaugurated Chinese language courses in schools and universities. On August 7, 2008, Yle reported on the newly established Meilahden ala-asteen Koulu—the first Finnish comprehensive school to offer a Finnish-Chinese programme and Chinese as the first compulsory foreign language. It quoted the headmaster of the school who claimed that interest in the Chinese language would increase in the future.

Excerpt 6

Alakoulun rehtori Päivi Paakkanen uskoo kiinnostuksen kiinankielistä opetusta kohtaan kasvavan tulevana vuosina. (Primary school headmaster Päivi Paakkanen believes interest in the Chinese language instruction will increase in the coming years.) (Yle, August 7, 2008)

Another news article reports that most schoolchildren have chosen English as their first foreign language, resulting in increasingly homogenous language skills among Finnish Schoolchildren. Interestingly, the news article, entitled *Koululaisten kielitaito on kaventunut – “englannista on tullut kolmas kotimainen”* (Schoolchildren’s language skills have narrowed - “English has become the third national language”. HS, November 10, 2015), starts with a short video about the Chinese learners in Meilahden Koulu. At the beginning of the video, a group of students sat in a Chinese-language classroom singing a Chinese song together, with smiles on their faces. An interview with two school girls who were around 10 years old followed. The girls were asked to say a few things in Chinese, such as their names, addresses, family members, and “I love you”. They both spoke clear and fluent

Chinese with confidence, in the opinion of a native Chinese speaker (the lead author). In the middle of this news article, a link to another news article is inserted. This article, *Ensin kiina, sitten englanti ja ruotsi* (First Chinese, then English and Swedish), is about the diverse language choices offered to its students by the Meilahden Koulu, where students can study via a Chinese-Finnish bilingual programme or Chinese as first foreign language. The use of the video of Chinese learners and the inserted link to another article about the Chinese language learning in an article about narrowing language skills draws readers' attention to counter discourses, creating the impression that despite the influence of English, the Chinese language is becoming popular.

These two excerpts implicitly constructed Chinese as an increasingly popular language in Finland. The first one was published in *Yle*, immediately after the establishment of the Meilahden Koulu and quoted the principal of the school predicting that interest in learning the Chinese language would increase. The second one was about the same school, but was published in *HS* seven years later, and seemed to confirm the principal's prediction.

Chinese as a difficult language

The final theme revealed a small number of news articles depicting Chinese as difficult language, through comparing learning Chinese with other European languages, particularly English. In the previously mentioned news article *Koululaisten kielitaito on kaventunut – "englannista on tullut kolmas kotimainen"* (The language skills of schoolchildren have narrowed - "English has become the third national language"). The author has successfully portrayed the Chinese language as a popular language (see the above section). However, the article ends with a picture of a schoolgirl sitting in a classroom, in which the walls are full of pictures of Chinese characters and Pinyin (the official romanization system for standard Chinese in mainland China). In the picture the girl looked serious and focused, with her right hand raised as if to ask a question. The caption of the picture said:

Excerpt 7

Kuudesluokkalaisen Säde Moision mukaan englanti on "easy peasy", mutta kiinaa oppiakseen joutuu tekemään tosissaan töitä. (According to sixth grader Säde Moision, English is "easy peasy", but in order to learn Chinese one has to make considerable efforts.) (HS, November 10, 2015)

Here the learning of the Chinese language is compared to the learning of English, where English is regarded as much easier to learn than Chinese. The use of the picture and its caption sends a message that learning the Chinese language is challenging for Finnish students. This message may seem to be somewhat irrelevant to the main theme of the article. However, the author does not just circulate widely shared discourse about the difficulty of learning the Chinese language among western

learners (e.g. see Duff et al. 2013) for no reason. By including such a seemingly irrelevant picture and its caption in an article about the popularity of the Chinese language, the author seems to imply that Chinese is for those who want success and are prepared to work for it, and perhaps, who have the intelligence to do so. So indirectly, the article sends a message that learning Chinese can create a good impression of one's character, i.e., someone who is hard working, determined, and looking for success. These types of discourses create certain images of the Chinese language, potentially influencing how people perceive the language.

Conclusions

In this paper, we have explored Finnish political documents and news articles in two main news outlets as discursive sites in which four prevailing categories of ideological discourses of the Chinese language are constructed and (re)produced. The messages implied in these discourses and exemplified in our analysis are that Chinese is becoming a popular, even global, language, and learning the Chinese language could bring job opportunities to individual learners and international competitiveness to the nation, but also that Chinese is potentially difficult for Finnish learners to learn. These findings point to three major conclusions.

First, the discourses about the benefits of learning Chinese in the Finnish context are not limited to a personal level, but often discussed in relation to national economic and political success. Previous studies show that ideological discourses about the Chinese language emphasise the economic advantage of learning Chinese in helping young people to secure jobs and the difficulty that the learners experience in learning Chinese (Duff et al., 2013). However, in our analysis, mastering the Chinese language is positioned as one of the ways to secure the Finnish nation's success in global competition. In addition to its usefulness, the Chinese language is often referred to as a world language or a global language, particularly in the policy documents. As Considine (1994) argues, policies contain, (re)produce and transmit values and assumptions about the phenomena they seek to act on and thereby define what is valuable and what is valued by those engaged in policy-making. The policy/strategy documents do not randomly select the Chinese language, but mirror the interests and assumptions of those who are involved in policy making about the value of the Chinese language. In this case, Finland, having experienced a long economic slowdown until fairly recently, appears to regard China's fast growing economy as an opportunity for its economic growth, with the implication that learning the Chinese language to engage with China is a means to boost Finland's economic growth and maintain its global competitiveness. This perceived importance of China has undoubtedly influenced Finland's policies concerning the learning of the Chinese language.

Second, our analysis shows that the increasing interest in learning Chinese is seldom seen as a

negative phenomenon in the Finnish media. Contrary to findings of Duff et al. (2013) in their study that news articles on the increasing numbers of non-Chinese Mandarin learners often employ words and metaphors with negative connotations, portrayals of learners of Chinese in Finland (such as the vocational school students in the picture and the Chinese-Finnish bilingual school students in the video) are quite positive. Although Duff et al. (2013) did not explain the reasons for the negative representation of the Chinese language in the media, we can infer that it is related to the circulating discourses about the rise of China as a threat (Zhang, 2010) and the promotion of the Chinese language as a soft power strategy by the Chinese government. Having a less significant role in the global political arena, Finland, unlike those major players such as US and UK, does not see the rise of China as a threat to its position, but is more interested in the (economic) opportunities this rise presents.

Third, despite the different stances they take, the policy documents and the two different news outlets are often discursively engaged with each other through circulating certain ideological discourses about the Chinese language. In the policy/strategy documents, the Chinese language is constructed as a “useful”, “world” language. These constructions are shared by many articles in the two Finnish news outlets. By giving voice to politicians and language experts and citing the policy documents, the news articles not only reinforce the ideologies about the Chinese language reflected in the policy/strategy documents, but also construct the discourse that the Chinese language is an increasingly popular language in Finland. Together, the policy documents and news articles contribute to the construction of the Chinese language as a promising language. As our analysis has shown, this construction seems to be mainly driven by economic interests. Behind these discourses, there is a strong interest to cash in on the enormous Chinese market and to attract investments from China. These ideological discourses about the Chinese language in the political documents and news outlets not only influence readers’ perceptions of the Chinese language, but also the status of the Chinese language in Finnish society and its position in the Finnish education system.

To conclude, this study is meaningful in two ways: firstly, by examining the ways in which the Chinese language is represented in Finnish media and political discourses, it can contribute to language ideology research by exploring a context not previously studied; secondly, in the context of current research about Chinese as a second language, it extends the agenda to language-ideological issues and examines how media discourses and political discourses contribute to shaping the social meaning of the Chinese language in Finland, that is, (and now summarise how it has been shaped).

The study has some limitations. Firstly, although the lead author has lived in Finland for over five years and has taken different Finnish courses, she does not have a full command of the Finnish language, which may have influenced the data selection and translation of the texts. Secondly, one of

the major critical reactions toward critical discourse analysis is the issue of interpretation: whether the analysts project their own political bias and prejudices onto the data and analyse them accordingly (Schegloff, 1997); and whether the analysts can speak for the average consumer of the texts (Widdowson, 1998). Efforts have been made to address these limitations. We have invited native Finnish-speaking colleagues to check all the translations. Other colleagues have also been invited to read and comment on our interpretation of the selected texts, and these comments have been taken into consideration.

As Milani (2013) reminds us, too strong a focus on representations of language in media texts and policy documents may not give a full picture of language ideologies in contemporary society. In their study of the Chinese language in the British context, Zhu & Li (2014) discovered that personal circumstances are the primary motivation for learners to learn Chinese. Future studies might explore the influence that these public discourses have on individuals' perceptions of the Chinese language in the Finnish context.

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